

DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
ACCESS AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN

WALLA WALLA AND COLUMBIA COUNTIES, WASHINGTON
UMATILLA, WALLOWA AND UNION COUNTIES, OREGON

USDA FOREST SERVICE
UMATILLA NATIONAL FOREST
WALLA WALLA RANGER DISTRICT
JULY 29, 1993

THE DECISION

An environmental assessment (EA) for access and travel management has been prepared. It examines the travel options for the entire Walla Walla Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest, in Walla Walla and Columbia counties Washington, and Umatilla, Wallowa and Union counties, Oregon. The EA and maps are available for review at Forest Service offices in Pendleton, Oregon and Walla Walla, Washington.

Based on the analysis described in the EA it is my decision to adopt and implement **Alternative 2-Wildlife Emphasis, with modifications**. In this alternative, the Walla Walla District identifies roads and trails to be opened or remain open, yearlong or seasonally for public or administrative use. Roads not currently needed for management or public access will be closed.

The following modifications will be made to Alternative 2:

1. Permits will be issued to grazing permittees to allow motorized use of specific closed roads, to allow camps to be established in areas most effective for animal management.

Permitted use for each "closed" road will be for limited period of time, and trips will be limited to the minimum needed to achieve desired results.

Permits and associated use will be monitored to determine actual usage of "closed" roads, and data will be used to calculate the effect on elk Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI).

2. Closure date of seasonal closure of roads 64 (North Fork Touchet from junction with 6400-650 to junction with 4600) will be changed from **December 1 to December 24**, to coincide with closure date on road 4600.
3. Road 64, north from Jubilee Lake to its junction with 6500, and roads 6413, 6415, and 6236 will be designated as snowmobile routes from **December 1 to March 31**.
4. Road 3109-026 will be open to provide motorized access to the Spring Mountain rock climbing area.

Alternative 2 will provide motorized access & travel in the following ways:

- 590 miles of open road will be available.
- Provide Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) travel on about 40% of the District, but limit it to designated routes and restricted roads, to enhance HEI.
- Cross-country motorized travel is prohibited year around, except within 300 feet of an open road for access to dispersed campsites, and oversnow travel by snowmobiles and Class I (motorized vehicles less than 50 inches wide and 600 pounds weight) ATV's.

- 199 miles of snowmobile routes will be available.
- 250 miles of restricted road will be regulated to allow Class I and III (motorcycle) ATV use only
- 15 miles of trails for Class I ATV use only will be available.
- Class II (*jeep* type vehicles) ATV's, when licensed for operation on public roads, are permitted to operate on open roads, and seasonal roads during open periods.
- 108 miles of trails for Class III ATV use and 250 miles of roads regulated for Class I and III use only.

Alternative 2 will provide the following for non-motorized access and travel:

- 500 miles of closed roads for non-motorized travel.
- 381,310 acres closed to overland motorized travel.
- 19 miles of designated cross country ski trails.
- 150 miles of horse, hiker and mountain bike trails.

Implementation of Alternative 2 will:

Improve the quality of elk habitat by increasing HEI and creating areas free of disturbance from motorized intrusion.

Expand hunting opportunities in a semi-primitive, non-motorized environment. Open road density decreases to 1.4 miles per square mile, compared to 2.1 miles under current management. Roads are available in most areas for motorized access to 99% of inventoried dispersed camp sites.

Continue the availability of winter recreation opportunities including snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing and snowplay.

Mitigate disturbance of elk in big game winter range by limiting the operation of snowmobiles and Class II ATV's in Tiger Canyon (Strategy Area #20) and Stumbough Ridge (Strategy Area #21).

Mitigate high open road density in important calving areas by seasonal spring closures in the Shimmiehorn/Johnson/Goodman Ridge areas within the Black #16 strategy area, while allowing motorized public access when not in conflict with big game biological needs.

Continue to allow Administrative use on open roads, but severely curtail it on designated closed roads. Permits for closed roads will be available for emergency and law enforcement use, and other uses where anticipated use is less than 1 round trip per month per road. Motorized administrative use in excess of this level would only be permitted where exclusion would restrict the management activity, such as grazing, from occurring. All use authorized by permit will be monitored to demonstrate compliance.

Provide a higher level of protection for Anadromous Fish Habitat. Nearly 500 miles of road is managed for a stable road bed condition, as a result of effective closure to motorized use.

Modify existing cooperative road closure management agreements with the states of Oregon and Washington.

Implementation of modifications to Alternative 2 will result in:

Increased management consistency between ranger districts by coordinating snowmobile route designation dates.

Increased user safety on snowmobile routes by providing legal designation of already marked and groomed routes, thereby reducing potential for conflicting use.

Recognizing the existing use pattern in the Spring Mountain area and providing adequate facilities to accommodate such use.

Providing an accountable means of allowing necessary motorized access for grazing allotment administration, without significantly reducing the big game habitat value (HEI) of an area.

Limitations on access and travel will be mitigated by the following measures:

1. Overland snowmobile use is permitted throughout the district except where specifically prohibited such as in big game winter range, specific high use spring calving areas, Wilderness and Mill Creek Watershed.
2. Class I ATV's, snowmobiles and cross-country skiers are allowed on all designated snowmobile trails.
3. Mountain bicycles, horses and hikers are allowed on all roads and trails open to motorized vehicles, including Restricted roads, and all Closed roads.
4. Class I, II, III ATV's are permitted on designated open roads, when properly licensed for use on public roads. These vehicles are not permitted on designated closed roads, or roads closed seasonally.
5. Motorized use of local (Restricted) roads is regulated to allow only Class I and III ATV's.
6. Access to dispersed camping sites by motorized vehicles is allowed within 300 feet of Open roads.
7. Snowmobiles are not permitted on designated Open roads when conditions allow wheeled vehicles.
8. Class II ATV's are not permitted on snowmobile routes.
9. Travel on Closed roads is prohibited for all motorized vehicles except snowmobiles and Class I ATV's over snow.
10. Firewood gathering is allowed pursuant to site specific analysis and resulting decisions, pursuant to the NEPA process.
11. A permit system for administrative use will be used to monitor the demand for and actual usage of Closed roads.

SCOPE OF THE DECISION

The scope of this decision is limited to the implementation of policy that affects access and travel on the Walla Walla Ranger District. This decision is programmatic in that it establishes short term management policy and provides guidance and a consistent basis for future decisions. Implementation of this decision will result in regulations and informational signing. No roads or trails will be removed from the managed system or obliterated.

Determining the long term management of individual roads is beyond the scope of the analysis. Long term management is based on the need to access areas for resource utilization ten years or longer into the future. Roads can be removed from the managed system and obliterated when no long term need is identified. Long term needs will be determined through site specific analysis by an interdisciplinary team.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

Alternative 2 with modifications and mitigation measures was selected for the following reasons:

1. Alternative 2 recognizes that motorized travel reduces the quality of wildlife habitat, as measured by the Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI), and provides for effective road closures that significantly improves HEI in several strategy areas and improves HEI marginally on a district-wide basis. Prohibiting cross-country motorized travel enhances the value of individual road closures.
2. Open road density is reduced from 2.2 to 1.4 miles per square mile, which should reduce big game disturbance and create effective security areas.
3. Regulation is minimized to achieve specific resource objectives without unduly restricting motorized access and travel.
4. Visitors have a wide range of access and travel opportunities from numerous geographic locations, although seasonal restrictions will prohibit motorized access to the District from Walla Walla on Tiger Canyon road 6500 from December 1 to March 31 annually.
5. Administrative use of motorized vehicles on closed roads is clarified. Closure regulations will apply to administrative use as well as public use, and the conditions for issuing permits for motorized use will apply equally to all potential users.
6. Anadromous fish habitat will benefit substantially more from this alternative than other alternatives, due to the higher mileage of closed road that should result in less sediment flowing into streams as a result of reduced vehicle traffic.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative 1: Continue Current Management

This alternative would continue the current management process of making access and travel management decisions on a site specific, planning area basis. Current management allows motorized vehicles to operate on all but about 5% of the District road system (although type of vehicle is regulated on some miles) and nearly 66% of the district is available for cross country OHV use. This type of planning and use has resulted elk habitat being managed at a minimum level, and allows a high level of disturbance in critical winter range and elk calving areas.

Alternative 3: Recreation Emphasis

This alternative improves HEI marginally, and provides expanded elk security areas in the Eden #8 strategy area during hunting season, but overall does not have a significant positive effect on improving elk habitat effectiveness in most areas. The higher level of motorized access for the public that this alternative would provide results in unacceptable levels of big game disturbance.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public has been involved in the access management process since 1990. During 1990 and 1991 a series of public meetings were conducted to solicit comments about the current management of access and travel on the Walla Walla Ranger District. In December 1990, and 1991, numerous projects involving access and travel management were presented for initial public comment.

The development of a comprehensive A&TM plan was begun in September 1992, and the interdisciplinary team (IDT) developed issues and alternatives based on past scoping of individual projects.

- Public comments on our existing situation (Alternative 1) were solicited at hunter information stations during October 1992.
- At the December 1992 District Open House all three alternatives analyzed by this EA, were displayed and comments were received.

- During the analysis of effects, following the December 1992 open house, the IDT presented information and received comments from the general public and State wildlife management agencies in Oregon and Washington.
- The results of the effects analysis were presented to Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Dept. of Wildlife, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Guiding the Course (District public interest group) and to the general public at the Pendleton Sportsman Show during April and May 1993.

Comments resulting from these presentations were used to modify the final versions of each alternative. Public involvement continues and comments will be solicited annually to update and potentially modify this decision.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined, based on the accompanying analysis, the analysis file, public and other cooperating agencies comments, that this is not a major Federal action and will have no adverse environmental effects over those addressed in the Forest Plan FEIS. This action will have limited context and intensity (40CFR 1508.27), individually or cumulatively to the biological, physical, social, or economic components of the human environment. It will have little or no adverse effect on:

- public health or safety.
- consumers, civil rights, minority groups and women.
- prime farmland, rangeland, and forestland; wetlands and floodplains.
- significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.
- roadless areas.
- dedicated or inventoried old growth forest.
- ecologically critical areas.
- threatened, endangered or sensitive species (or their habitat). (Biological evaluations are on file at the district office).

The action does not pose a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Therefore, I find that an environmental impact statement is unnecessary.

REQUEST FOR REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation will not occur before 45 days following the publication of this notice in the newspaper of record, the East Oregonian.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36CFR 217. Any written Notice of Appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 (Content of Notice of Appeal), and must include the reasons for appeal. The Notice of Appeal must be filed in duplicate with the Reviewing Officer, Jeff Blackwood, Forest Supervisor, Umatilla National Forest, 2517 S.W. Hailey Avenue, Pendleton, Oregon 97801, within 45 days of the date of the legal notice in the East Oregonian newspaper.

For further information contact me or interdisciplinary team leader Carl Maass at the Walla Walla Ranger District, 1415 West Rose, Walla Walla, WA 99362, telephone (509) 522-6290.


Thomas K. Reilly, District Ranger

7/29/93
Date